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CAPITAN AND TIN TIN

BY LAURA EVERTSEN KING.

(Read April 7, 1898.)

In the words of Polonius, "Still harping on my daughter," you will perhaps say, but the subject of the Mission Indians has always been an interesting one to me. Taught in my early youth to seek that which was best in human nature, I naturally saw only the good in the Indian. In disposition like a child, easily led, but stubborn if driven, he could be managed by those who were kind to him without difficulty. Always looking with reverence upon those whom he considered his superiors, I was free to go and come among them in perfect safety, not safety from bodily harm, but immunity from coarseness or vulgarity. And "hush! there comes Lalita," was the password. In the early fifties, the main street or roadway of the Mission San Gabriel ran about a mile and three-quarters from the church in shape like a reclining letter L, the lines of the long shank of the letter-shaped street vanishing among the live-oak trees to the north of the Mission. On one side and between rows of willows, ran the zanja which watered the "milpas" of the Indians. And on either side of the street were the "jacals" or huts built of adobe and thatched with tule, which was cut in the lake near Pasadena, tied in bundles, dried in the sun, and bound on the roofs with thongs of the same, making a picturesque and weather-proof covering. There dwelt the remnant of the Mission Indinas. They planted corn, beans, pumpkins, peas and chiles, and flowers of the brightest hues nodded to their reflections in the rippling zanja.

I passed every morning and evening along this road to school, and was always greeted with a "buenos dias Lalita" from such as were sitting sunning themselves outside their doors. Quiet and gentle old Capitan and his wife raised mocking birds for market. In the spaces between the walls and thatched roof of his house the birds built their nests, and at the proper age for selling he carefully packed his young birds in an old tin pail some one had given him, and walked to Los Angeles, carrying his pail on his arm. Or if from necessity he sometimes sacrificed an old bird it rose to the dignity of a cage made of reeds or cane. Old Capitan was very reliable in

his dealings with customers, and one could always be sure that his bird was a singer; there being but a very slight difference in the feathers of the wings, it was an easy matter to pass upon a novice a female bird. The females do not sing. His birds were his pets, and ate from his hands and sat upon his shoulders. They also came at his call. I remember distinctly, my mother had bought a bird from him, and, escaping from its cage, it flew to the topmost bough of an olive tree. The bird was given up as lost, until some one suggested sending for old Capitan. He came with an old cage, and, setting it upon the ground near by, gave a peculiar cry, which the bird answered, and to the astonishment of all, flew down from his perch and quietly entered the cage. Then he handed the bird to his mistress and returned home, not expecting any more reward than to have shown his influence over his pets.

Then there was "Tin-Tin." Poor "Tin-Tin," whose worst fault was his love of "Agua Ardiente." But then, the Americans were the cause of his downfall, which occurred every Saturday night. All the week he labored faithfully and conscientiously, but on Sunday morning he would be seen by those on their way to the church with his head in the ditch, dragged there by some friend, to cool him off for Monday's work. He was a fine specimen of the Indian, as he was, and should be but for the civilization of the white man; being tall and straight, and well built. But what constitution could stand "fire water" and exposure week after week? In his prime he was taken to the ditch for the last time a victim of his appetite, and the greed of the white man.

I must not forget the church choir, which made the round of every house on Sunday after services. It was composed of four musical instruments, flute, violin, (some were rude enough to call it a fiddle,) triangle and drum. The principal object of the choir was the collection of tithes, which everyone was very willing to pay after listening to the music for an hour. The poet sang "Music hath charms to sooth the savage breast." It may have been that looking upon us as "aliens," they wished to impress us with the force of the quotation. The music was wild and weird, and helped to pass an otherwise long and lonely Sunday afternoon. I think that we all felt sad to see the "church choir" gradually transferred from this to the "choir invisible." And let us hope that in their "happy hunting grounds" they have exchanged the fiddle for the bow, and in exchanging their triangle have received the "horn of plenty," and all is on the "square."